HOW TO BRING A GODDESS INTO BEING
THROUGH VISIBLE SOUND

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That language may have more important tasks than "meaning" was axiomatic for Sanskrit grammarians and poeticians. A simple, widely cited tripartite typology of texts corresponds to three distinct formalizations of linguistic potential. First, there are texts, like the Veda, that are *śabda-pradhāna*, that is, their sonar and acoustic properties are primary; such texts, properly pronounced or performed, work change on the world. Enormous care must be taken in articulating and preserving *śabda-pradhāna* texts; to mispronounce a single syllable, even to make a mistake in accentuation, can have fatal consequences, as the tragic example of the demon Triśiras makes clear.[1] *Śabda-pradhāna* texts may also have "meaning" of one kind or another—a classic discussion in the Mīmāṃsā decides in favor of the meaningfulness of the Vedic mantras[2]—but semantics matters much less, in this category, than the automatic effectual and creative powers inherent in pure sound. Mammaṭa, the twelfth-century Kashmiri poetician who offers one version of this typology in the introduction to his *Kāvya-prakāśa*, says that texts in this category simply command, speaking as a master would to his servants.[3] What, however, is the content of such commands?

Then there are texts that are *artha-pradhāna*, where meaning (*artha*) predominates. Erudite *śāstras* may exemplify this type; or, for Mammaṭa, this is the domain of history and ancient lore (*purāṇâdîtihāsa*). Information matters, form much less so, if at all. There are many ways to state facts or tell a traditional story. Such texts, says Mammaṭa, are like friends who persuade, argue, explain.

Finally we have poetry, *kāvya*, in which sound and meaning are equally dominant (*śabdârtha-pradhāna*). In poetry you cannot separate meaning from its uniquely suited forms of expression. This Sassurean perception may, however, give way to another, somewhat surprising one: both

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[1] Thus Patañjali, *Paśpasâhnika*.
[2] See Śabara on *Mīmāṃsā-sūtra* 1.2.4.31–58.
[3] Mammaṭa, *Kåvya-prakāśa* 1.1.

"sound" and "meaning" may turn out to be subordinate to other goals (*śabdârthayor guṇa-bhāvena*)—for example the business (*vyāpāra*) of experiencing cognitive and emotional liquefaction, *rasa*.[4] In any case, Mammaṭa assures us, poetry works on us like a beloved (*kāntā*) and, as such, is capable of transporting us beyond ourselves, beyond the every-day world (*lokottara-varṇanā-nipuṇa-kavi-karma*).

Poetry, then, has its own inherently effective mechanisms and pur-poses. How precisely to understand them is a deep and recurrent prob-lem which could be said to structure the entire history of Indian poetics. A certain metaphysical drift is noticeable from very early on. Poetry does something to its listeners. If you hear a poem and nothing happens, the poet has failed. In this sense, categories one and three have a certain affinity, as the tradition itself clearly recognized. Moreover, it is definitely possible to write a grammar of non-semanticized linguistic operations.[5] Grammars of poetry, which always assume that poetic utterances are at least superficially meaningful, are also capable of addressing what could be call trans-semantic experiments with poetic language. Here poetry shades off into *mantra*, in distinct patterns and modes.

I want to examine several cases of such trans-semantic operations and to attempt to draw a few tentative connections, which may show us something about the development of poetry, and of poetic science, in medieval India.

Chāndogya Upaniṣad 1.13.1–4

Consider the following short text, which concludes the famous *udgītha* section of the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*:

> 1. *ayaṃ vāva loka hau-karaḥ. vāyur hai-kāraś. candramā atha-kāraḥ. ātmeha-kāro. 'gnir ī-kāraḥ.* 2. *āditya ū-kāro. nihava e-kāro. viśvedevā au-ho-yi-kāraḥ. prajāpatir hiṃ-kāraḥ. prāṇaḥ svaro 'nnam yā vāg virāṭ.* 3. *aniruk-tas trayodaśaḥ stobhaḥ saṃcāro huṃ-kāraḥ.* 4. *dugdhe 'smai vāg doham. yo vāco doho 'nnavān annādo bhavati ya etāṃ evaṃ sāmnām upaniṣadaṃ vedopaniṣadaṃ veda.*

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[4] Ibid.
[5] Conversely, Bhartṛhari devotes much attention to the question of how "language"—the primordial, divine hum or buzz of creation—evolves into a semanticized force. See *Vākya-padīya* 1.44–58, with *vṛtti*. For a grammar of mantra, see Patton 1996.

> 1. The sound *hau* is this world. The sound *hai* is the wind. The word *atha* is the moon. The word *iha* ["here"] is the self. The sound *ī* is fire. 2. The sound *ū* is the sun. The sound *e* is the invocation. *Au-ho-i* is the All-Gods. The sound *him* is Prajāpati. Sound itself is breath. *Ya* is food. Language is Virāj. 3. Then there is the thirteenth sound *hum*, an interjection that varies, that is what cannot be said. 4. Language milks itself of milk, the milk of language, for him who has food, who eats food, for him who knows in this way the *Upaniṣad* of the *Sāman* chants, who knows the connection.

Vedic ritual, as is well known, loves mysterious connections (*bandhu*; also *upaniṣad, brahman*).[6] The Vedic cosmos is woven together by relating elements from seemingly distinct levels or domains, and this strong interweaving—the perception of one thing as another[7]—allows the ritualist to generate actual existential transitions and transformations. He can, for instance, go to heaven, achieve a divine body, and also return home for a safe landing. Much depends on how much he knows, just as in the text cited above it is the one who knows—in a certain way, *evam*—who has food. And not just any food: language milks itself (actually herself, since *vāc* is feminine) as a direct, perhaps automatic result of the ritualist's esoteric knowledge. It is as if what he knows is the inner mechanism of language, or the true, delicious meaning of sounds and words.

For such a person, language operates in a manner utterly remote from ordinary reference and denotation. What we hear as phonic matter—syllables like *hau, hai, him*, or the string *au-ho-yi*—has distinct, and secret, meaning. A whole cosmos is reassembled through these sounds, whose context is ritual performance with the *udgītha* recitation at its center. We can assume that *udgītha* language is heightened, intensified, denaturalized, and effectual. It has properties that operate upon the cosmos through the play of subtle phonic patterns, unintelligible to our ears but perhaps all the more effective because of this. They do not, however, appear to work wholly automatically; the epistemic intention of the singer or speaker makes all the difference between his eating or going hungry. Language has a hidden core or essence—glossed as milk—which can be produced by ritual knowledge and its associated praxis. It also has an internal hierarchy. Some sounds are more useful

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[6] See Renou 1978.

[7] E.g. dawn is the head of the sacrificial horse, the sun its eye, the year its body, and so on: *Bṛhad-āraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 1.1.1. "Seeing (X) as (Y)" is, Yigal Bronner suggests, a possible translation for the classical trope of *utprekṣā*.

than others—especially, it would seem, those that do not "mean" in the usual way. There are also elements that repeat or that embed themselves, in whole or part, in larger segments (thus *au-ho-yi*, the All-Gods, contains [*h*]*au* and *i*). Above all there is the interjection, the thirteenth element which must comprise a totality—all of time, always 12 + 1, the year as sequence and the year as a holistic unity—and, not too surprisingly, this element is at the edge of silence. There is a need in this system for the *anirukta*, the unuttered, that which cannot be said. Elsewhere in the Veda we are told that only one quarter of language is available to us; the rest is hidden in another world, perhaps in silence.[8]

It is nonetheless important to note that this obscure Upaniṣadic passage also includes what may be called semantic residues in its identifications. At least three of the sound-signs are familiar words: *atha* ("now", "from this point on"), *iha* ("here") and *vāc* ("speech," "language" seen in relation to the divine transitional being, Virāj). The temporal marker, *atha*, is lunar in character; whereas the very "self" of the reciter is present, or made to be present, somehow actualized, in the word-token meaning "here." This usage is instructive. Actual words can transcend their normal semantic burdens and yet refer to a second-order, perhaps deeper meaning. Such a meaning, encrypted in everyday speech, is what really works. We are heedless of the potential that lurks in the sounds and syllables we utter out of habit; but there are moments when their true force rings out and can, perhaps, be heard by an ear attuned to a fuller listening. A dimension of ultimacy inheres in sound *qua* sound, for *svara*, phonic or musical utterance, is *prāṇa*, breath; throughout this first section of the Upaniṣad, *prāṇa* competes with *ākāśa*, space, for the privilege of ontic primacy, of being the final source of the *udgītha* and, indeed, of reality itself.

There is always a temptation to allegorize these *bandhu*-type identifications. Śaṅkarâcārya succumbs to it (thus *him* "means" Prajāpati because Prajāpati, the Vedic creator, is "unsayable" or "indistinct" like the syllable *him*, and so on),[9] and modern commentators often follow in his wake. Analogy or resemblance is, however, a weak basis for understanding the kind of system in evidence here. Does *hau* resemble the world? Is *ī* an analogue of fire? Sounds seemingly have an autonomous,

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⁸ *ṚgVeda* 1.164.45.
⁹ *aniruktyād dhiṅkārasya câvyaktatvât*: Śaṅkara on *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* (p. 386). Cf. his gloss on 3: *anirukto 'vyaktatvād idaṃ cedaṃ ceti nirvaktuṃ na śakyata iti.*

non-adventitious career. As such, they may also generate meanings and, through these meanings, specific, designated changes in the world. At least one aspect of this autonomy native to articulate sound and underlying its efficacy may turn up in section 12, immediately preceding our text—the famous passage where a white dog joins with several others in performing the *udgītha* chant (*śauva udgīthaḥ*). They complete the ritual by singing *him* (= Prajāpati?) followed by *Om* and requests for food and drink. Generations of Indologists have interpreted this section as a parody of Vedic ritual and its performers, but its strategic placement toward the climax of the first *prapāṭhaka* of the *Chāndogya*, and immediately before our short text and its explicit phonic decoding, suggests that parody is not the proper genre.[10] A barking dog, under optimal conditions, may well set the cosmos back on course.

To sum up so far: Sounds relate to meaning in very distinct patterns. Sometimes they mean what they are (the wind, the moon). Sometimes they mean through indirection, an ordinary semantics concealing an extraordinary one. Sometimes what is not audible or, for that matter, sayable is what counts most. Sounds functioning on this level, in specialized ritual contexts, also set up internal relations on a musical level, and it is this level which allows for the rebuilding or rearranging of a world. If you know what to do with such phonic materials, what or how they really mean, and how they are inter-connected (the *upaniṣad*), you can generate states of enduring fullness. Unlike later texts, however, the *Chāndogya* does not *tell* you what to do with the tantalizing identifications it reveals.

Citra *Poetry: Making Language Visible*

Upaniṣadic-style correspondences between sound and psycho-cosmic entities become routine in much later Yogic and Tantric texts, although, as we shall see, the ritual uses of such correspondences are radically reconceived. Moreover, the mere utterance of esoteric sounds by an initiate is not really sufficient to produce the kind of far-reaching results that the texts promise. *Mantras*, or *mantra*-like poems pronounced by poets gifted with the ability to bless or to curse (*śāpânugraha-sāmarthya*), are, no doubt, highly effective transformers of reality. But when one wants,

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[10] See the recent discussion of this passage by Arbatov 2003.

for example, to bring a goddess into being, or to wake her up from her slumbers in the depths of one's own body, something more may be required. A graphic, visual dimension becomes integral to the intra-linguistic, sonar process. The complex arrangement of encoded sound patterns in multi-sequential, modular constructs has visible conse-quences. In this context, properly poetic considerations also come into play. Thus historically the way to the phonic activation or actualization of Tantric deities goes through certain prevalent features of poetic praxis in Sanskrit (also later in the regional languages). The most salient of these features emerge in what is known as *citra-kāvya,* "picture poetry."[11]

Citra-kāvya is first fully grammaticalized by Daṇḍin in his *Kāvyâdarśa,* a text which inspired spin-offs in Tamil, Tibetan, and other regional languages. Daṇḍin defines several types of *citra* verses based on com-plex forms of phonetic-syllabic repetition, including regular alternation between repeating and non-repeating syllables, palindromes, double palindromes, rotating sequences, and other geometric patterns.[12] He acknowledges that even the simpler types of such verses are difficult to produce (*duṣkara,* 78). Daṇḍin's discussion very naturally moves from *citra* poetry to riddles *(prahelikā,* 3.96), which he classes as "amuse-ments" in learned assemblies (*krīḍā-goṣṭhī-vinoda*). No one who has tried to decipher *citra* verses will deny this playful aspect. On the other hand, here, as in other south Asian domains, playfulness is perhaps an index of the truly serious. Later poeticians such as Mammaṭa and Vidyānātha expand the discussion of *citra* to include well-known dia-grams (*citra-bandha*) formed by plotting the syllables of the verse onto spatial grids so that visual images (a sword, a lotus, a drum, a wheel, the track of a cart, and so on) emerge—once again, through various patterns of syllabic repetition.[13] Such a verse, that is, both unfolds its (often rather secondary) verbal-semantic burden and, graphically enacted on palm-leaf or paper or, perhaps, in the mind's eye, describes a concrete object composed of patterned combinations of recurring and non-repeating phonemes. In this latter function, the verse—both in its phonematic progression and its tangible "meaning"—can actually be seen; very often, it is visualized in movement, as if the phonetic materials one hears

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[11] Other possible translations include "flashy" or "special effects" or "virtuoso" poetry—see Tubb forthcoming, and cf. Latin *carmina figurata.*
[12] *Kāvyadarśa* of Daṇḍin 3.78–83.
[13] See examples in Mammaṭa 9.85 (pp. 529–34); *Pratāpa-rudrīya* of Vidyānātha, 5.11–13 (pp. 249–52); also Ingalls 1989.

were literally sculpting or weaving a newly emergent object in three-dimensional space.

I want to look briefly at one relatively straightforward example, which I take from the Tamil text modelled after Daṇḍin and known as *Taṇṭiyalaṅkāram* (composed sometime between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries in the far south).[14] The first example of a *citra* verse cited by this text is the following:

> *paruvam ākav ito kaṉa-mālaiye*
> *pŏruv'ilāv uḻai mevaṉa kāṉame*
> *maruvum ācai viṭā kaṉa-mālaiye*
> *vĕruval āyiḻai pūv' aṇi kālame*[15]

We could translate, making several rather difficult choices consequent upon intentional ambiguity and word-play en route, as follows:

> The time has come:
> Depth of evening.
> Dark clouds line the sky.
> Deer, graceful beyond compare,
> live in this forest, where
> as evening turns
> black, desire fails
> to relent. Don't
> be afraid, delightful woman.
> He's coming now, at any moment,
> to flood you with flowers.

The speaker is apparently the girlfriend and companion of the heroine in a classical, *akam*-style lovers' drama.[16] The heroine has grown impatient: her lover promised her he would come now, at the beginning of the rainy season, to a rendezvous in the *mullai* region of forested hills; but he is inexplicably delayed. The pain of separation is always most intense—so the Tamil poets tell us—at this moment when evening falls; and evening, drawing on toward night with no sign of the beloved, is particularly excruciating during the monsoon.[17] The girlfriend is doing her best

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[14] The text is mentioned by the commentator Aṭiyārkkunallār (13th century). On the dating, see Zvelebil 1975, 192–93.

[15] *Taṇṭiyalaṅkāram*, 3.2.1.

[16] In "Caṅkam" poetry, *akam* poems, the so-called "inner" category, focus on love relationships.

[17] Compare such well-known examples of evening love-sickness in the *mullai* region as *Kuṟuntŏkai* 66 and 234, and Nammāḻvār's reworking of this theme in *Tiruviruttam* 68; also discussion in Ramanujan 1981, 158–59.

to prop up the drooping heroine (who is, we may assume, as innocent and vulnerable as the wide-eyed deer in the forest): surely the lover will arrive at any moment and fulfil his promise. A sense of urgency informs the entire verse and also brackets it explicitly: the opening word, *paruvam*, means "season," "time," and the final word is an emphatic *kālame*, once again "time." Within this straitjacket of remorseless temporality— the neutral, inexorable progression of the seasons—we can easily feel, with the heroine, the unbearable, constantly intensifying strain of waiting. Yet she has clearly not given up hope: perhaps after all he will come, tonight, to cover her with flowers. This vacillating emotional state, very economically and delicately articulated, has an iconic correlate on the level of purely aural effects, as we shall see in a moment.

It is a strong poem, precisely because of its relative simplicity. The whole sadness of time is somehow contained in four short lines. One could even leave it at that—had our text not brought it as an example of *citra-kāvya* (Tam. *cittira-kavi*). Indeed, the *citra* aspect is clearly felt by our author to dominate the poem, even to supply its true *raison d'être*. Let us then turn to this domain of musicality and phono-visual patterning. If we recite or record the poem in the standard mode of reproducing Tamil verses, in which metrical units appear rather than lexemes, we have:

> *paruva mākavi tokaṉa mālaiye*
> *pŏruvi lāvuḻai mevaṉa kāṉame*
> *maruvu mācaivi ṭakaṉa mālaiye*
> *vĕruva lāyiḻai pūvaṇi kālame*

Or, in standard representation of the lines (quarters):

> = – / – = / – = / – = /

Notice the strong double beat at the transition between feet 1 and 2, the rhythmic fulcrum of the line.[18] Already this metrico-graphic arrangement takes us some distance from the simple semantic level in the direction of strongly musical or rhythmic effects. The sentences, along with the verbal units that inhere in them, begin to decompose, even to disappear, as is usually the case when Tamil poetry is orally recited. At the same time, the conspicuous metrical arrangement has the advantage of opening up possibilities for *śleṣa*-paronomasia—since defamiliarization

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[18] As John Marr 1985 has shown, Tamil metrics are classically based on ictus.

of the linear, normative semantic unfolding of the sentences highlights the resonant lexical potential of isolated phonic units. All such *citra* verses operate through what is called *yamaka*, literally "twinning,"[19] *i.e.* the foregrounded repetition of sound sequences (often across word boundaries), as Gary Tubb has noted. *Śleṣa* itself is, in one sense, a superimposed or simultaneous *yamaka* (or *yamaka* is a sequentially strung-out *śleṣa*)—though this formulation does not do justice to the range of techniques and effects connected to these two terms. In the present instance, we thus have *kaṉa mālaiye* in quarters *a* and *c* (also *kaṉa* alone in *a*, *b*, and *c*); while *mācai* in *c* lends itself, at first hearing, to several possible decodings (< *mācu*, "darkness," but also "fault," "flaw"; [*m*]*ācai*, "desire," etc.). *Mālai*, at the end of *a* and *c*, is the common word for "evening"—and also the "line" or "garland" of rainclouds hovering over the forest; even more powerfully, it could be read as an accusative of *māl*, "passion," "love-madness,"[20] so that the girl's friend would actually be telling her, quite literally, "Don't be afraid (*veruval*) of the passion you are feeling." In addition, **mākavi* in the second foot of *a* [<(*m*) *ākav i*(*tu*)] hides the homophonous *mā-kavi*, "great poet"—a boast actually built into the opening statement, with its promise of technical virtuosity. We could go on in this vein, but the general process of playing with repeated strings of identical phonemes should by now be clear.

But this is only the beginning. The verse in question is meant to be graphically displayed in such a way that quarters *a* and *b* are placed above *c* and *d*, which allows one to "read" the verse either in its natural linear sequence—horizontally—or by "zigzagging" from one line to the next (the first syllable in the top line is followed by the second syllable in the bottom line, and so on; from the halfway point, one starts with the first syllable in the second line and zigzags upwards to the second syllable in the top line, etc.). Thus we obtain

pa ru va mā ka vi to ka ṉa mā lai ye pǒ ru vi lā vu ḷai me va ṉa kā ṉa me

ma ru vu mā cai vi ṭā ka ṉa mā lai ye věru va lā yi ḷai pū va ṇi kā la me

The zigzag pattern is aptly named *go-mūtrikā*, "cow's piss," for reasons perfectly obvious to anyone who has ever walked behind a urinating cow in India. The underlying principle is very simple, as Gerow has noted:[21]

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[19] See Tubb 2003, 8.
[20] See discussion of this term in Handelman and Shulman 2004, 178–79.
[21] Gerow 1971, 181.

every other syllable in corresponding quarters (*a* to *c* and *b* to *d*) must be identical. Slightly more complicated *go-mūtrikā-bandhas*, such as the example given by Daṇḍin in *Kāvyâdarśa* 3.79,[22] allow the reader to *start* the verse from quarter *c* (bottom line) and to zigzag upwards to *a*, then back to *c*, and so on—in effect weaving the poem together by an over- lay of two alternative, equally "correct" or precise zigzags, so that *visu- ally* the same phonematic sequence is unfolding twice, simultaneously (though to manifest the zigzag *audibly* requires the standard temporal sequence of recitation and thus a particularly sensitized listener). The two readings, or two directions of movement, actually intersect in the transition between every two syllables, creating a kind of purely visual *śleṣa*. This sense of complex, often multi-directional movement through the *bandha* diagram is critical. More complicated figures such as the devilishly ingenious magic square, *sarvatobhadra*, allow simultaneous readings forwards and backwards as well as vertically and horizontally, for example. For that matter, even the more or less clear-cut *go-mūtrikā* can be doubled or quadrupled, as Ingalls has shown for a verse in Ānandavardhana's *Devī-śataka*; the result is, according to his calcula- tion, 256 ways of reading each quarter, thus exactly 4,260,312,864 (i.e., 256 to the fourth power) ways of putting together the complete verse— and this is only one short poem.[23] Plotting this kind of *go-mūtrikā* geo- metrically produces a dense net of criss-crossing lines; hence another name for this figure, *jāla-bandha*, "lattice."[24] The range of possibilities is undeniably impressive, and for the more advanced figures the services of a topologist may be necessary. For lack of space and geometric skill, I resist the temptation to explore further examples.

We have not yet exhausted even the short *Taṇṭiyalaṅkāram* verse. After the excursus into mathematical (*i.e.* strictly sonar) perspectives, we can now allow ourselves another glimpse of the overt semantics ot this poem. Anyone can attune his or her ear to the music of the articu- lated sounds,[25] but what is most striking to someone who knows Tamil is the way each of the lines—which can be heard, with some effort, *across* the metrical divisions—has its own autonomy. Moreover, these lines are

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[22] *madano madirākṣīṇām apâṅgâstro jayed ayam/*
     mad-eno yadi tat-kṣīṇam anaṅgāyâñjaliṃ dade//
[23] Ingalls 1989, 571–72.
[24] Gerow, loc. cit.
[25] One should pay particular attention to the cumulative and contrasting effects of the liquids and nasals—*l, ḷ, ṉ, m.*

more or less interchangeable. Even in English translation, one could reproduce something of this effect, for instance by transposing *a* and *b*:

> Deer, graceful beyond compare,
> live in this forest, where
> dark clouds line the sky.
> Depth of evening.
> The time has come.

And so on: readers can work out the possible permutations. Contrary to Ingalls' rather dismissive comment on this aspect of such verses ("Any four-line stanza in Sanskrit where the clausal boundaries coincide with the *pāda* boundaries may be read in 24 ways"),[26] the relative, and consistent, autonomization of individual lines or quarters is no trivial matter. It reveals on the semantic level a strong parallel to what is happening on the level of sound patterns. Put starkly, the "normal" linear sequence that is intrinsic to all audible language is disrupted so severely that the poem, or the sentence, reorganizes itself around individual, semi-independent units that are capable of combining or resonating with other such units in new, only minimally semanticized ways. A dimension of simultaneity is restored to such heightened language, which begins to *look* or *sound* both somewhat surreal and, at the same time, compacted and dense with an expressive fullness of an entirely different order. Bhartṛhari, who believed that audible sequence in language was, in a certain sense, illusory, would have approved.

   "*Look* or *sound*:" the visual aspect of all this is crucial. Like the Israelites in the desert, we can "see the sounds."[27] We need only know where to look or how to listen. The mere existence of two (or more) criss-crossing audible sequences, simultaneously intersecting and repeating in the visual dimension, imparts a certain volume or depth to such a verse. Informing this experimentation with depth is the unstated principle that in the highly charged domain of poetic utterance, homophonous repetition is always significant, expressive, non-random, and subject to an expansive tangibility and plasticity. Homophony, we could say, induces a perception of homology in the sense of condensed, self-replicating, also subtly varied, musical patterns or themes. Each such repetition presents us with its own semantic range, enriched by reference to earlier and later

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[26] Ingalls 1989, 570.
[27] *Exodus* 20:14.

occurrences of similar phonic sequence. The poem also has integrity as
a whole organized vertically as well as horizontally, these vectors criss-
crossing very much in the manner of the *go-mūtrikā* quarters.

Let me repeat: the meaning-bearing segment of this multi-level poetic
experience is not rendered irrelevant by the sheer musicality and complex
rhythmic effects that the verse projects. Quite the contrary: "meaning"
is, if anything, enhanced, though not perhaps along the lines of our
classical interpretative habits. Moreover, a pervasive iconicity is pres-
ent on all levels. As hinted earlier, the heroine's emotional and sensory
configuration—the official "subject" of the poem—is reconfigured both
in the linear, normative semantic mode and in its mathematical or visual
correlates as conveyed by the phonemes through their combinations and
repetitions. In a way, this is the whole point. To fully internalize the con-
sequences of such play with language, one has to recognize that the pho-
nemes, once liberated from the burdens of standard semantic sequence,
take on a life of their own, setting up complex sets of relations organized
musically rather than by any overt linear semantics. This, in fact, is what
we see when we study the geometric diagrams that such verses trace on
paper or in our minds. *Citra-bandha* verses *always* focus attention on
selected, *yamaka*-driven syllables, which "repeat" themselves in patterns
that are not isomorphic with a standard, sequential, naturally meaning-
ful recitation. These syllables—usually at the very center of the lotus, or
the hilt of the sword, or the innermost spoke of the wheel, or at certain
neuralgic points in the coils of a serpent—re-order or re-imagine the
verse in these same, visualizable forms.

An adequate description of any such verse requires a language wait-
ing to be invented, operating with a grammar waiting to be inductively
defined. We can, perhaps, approximate such a language by thinking of
citra poetry as architectonic, in a sonar or musical sense—that is, as cre-
ating three-dimensional, spatial constructs alive with inner movement,
charged with expressive potential of an unexpectedly "symphonic"
character. The superimposition of autonomized sounds, split or mul-
tiple verbal meanings, visual depth, and self-driven metrical or rhyth-
mic patterns creates this three-dimensionality, probably the most basic
feature of *citra-kāvya*. Underlying this poetic praxis is a new belief that
a syllable (*akṣara*) or phoneme (*varṇa*) has visual form. We will see how
far this belief takes the Tantrika poets. But the fact that *citra* verses, once
decoded, so often produce visible objects (or at the least visible geo-
metric patterns) should also suggest to us another important element
of such poetry, one that could be said to hypertrophy in Tantra. These

poems are anything but descriptive. They tend, rather, to the effectual or efficacious and may, indeed, have originated in precisely such practical ("magical,"[28] "religious,"[29] personally useful)[30] contexts.

Encoded Citra: *What Sounds Really Mean*

Sometimes we have to remind ourselves that Tantric poetry is, indeed, poetry, worthy of attention on the aesthetic no less than the ritual or metaphysical level. As implied in the last paragraph, all such domains may turn out to be eminently pragmatic in usage, and poetry even more so than the others. Perhaps our discussion of *citra-kāvya* has prepared us to take another look at the poetics of sound in one universally acknowledged masterpiece, the *Saundarya-laharī* (*SL*) or "Wave of Beauty" that is incorrectly attributed to Śaṅkarâcārya. We will, however, be concerned less with the text of the *SL* itself than with Lakṣmī-dhara's sixteenth-century commentary on two fundamentally important verses. The materials themselves are fairly well known, and I make no claim to innovation or special insight; but there are more general principles, worthy of restatement, involved in these verses and their commentary and germane to the issues raised above.

The *SL* celebrates—perhaps we would do better to say "activates"—the goddess Tripura-sundarī, "the most beautiful in the tripartite cosmos," who is the main deity of the Kaula system known as *Śrī-vidyā*.[31] This form of Kaulism, which became widespread in south India after the end of the first millenium, amalgamated radical Śākta cultic practices with the householder's ethos, on the one hand, and with a well-developed Yogic physiology based on the six *cakras* or subtle energy-centers, on

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28 Gerow, 178.
29 Ibid., 177.
30 Smith 1985, 135: "The origin of this fashion was almost certainly the writing of verses on weapons." Smith also notes the strong relation between *citra-bandha* verses and the battle sections of *mahā-kāvya*—where geometric military formations are de rigueur. But if we extend the range of our observations backward into the late-Vedic and early-epic layers of the tradition, we will discover complex geometric patterns governing the narrative structure of major texts. *Citra-kāvya* makes such effects conscious and explicit and packs them into the frame of the individual verse. See Brereton 1997.
31 More precisely, verses 1–41 of this text, the so-called *Ānanda-laharī* (see below), derive from this Kaula system in relation to Kubjikā (of the "Western Tradition", *paścimâmnāya*): see Sanderson 2002, 1–3, especially n. 24. I am grateful to Professor Sanderson for discussions of dating and lineage in these texts. See also Michael 1986.

the other. It also integrated into a Smārta, orthoprax domain strong elements of what Sanderson calls "erotic magic."[32] The *SL*, a relatively late text—perhaps twelfth or thirteenth century[33]—is without doubt one of the most beloved and popular of all *Śrī-vidyā* literary works. Its verses, composed in a highly distinctive Sanskrit style, are, indeed, "magical." Many worshippers of the goddess recite the entire set of one hundred verses every day upon waking.

The tradition itself, however, correctly sees this book as combining two distinct parts—verses 1–41, the so-called *Ānanda-laharī* ("Wave of Joy") and verses 42–100, the *Saundarya-laharī* proper.[34] The first segment in fact builds an image of the goddess as a cosmos in her own right and as the creator of the cosmos we inhabit, whose inner workings are explained in terms of the well-known series of six subtle psycho-physiological *cakras* or bodily centers. This part of the text is clearly aimed at practices of visualization and mantric exercises, as we will see; eventually, if properly put to use, it allows the female and male elements within this goddess-informed cosmos to recombine, thereby reversing the standard direction of cosmogonic deterioration (see verse 9). From verse 42 onward we have an exquisite, lyrical description of Tripura-sundarī, limb by limb, no doubt also aimed at visualization but lacking the mantric, pragmatic aspect of the first part of the poem.

This division is emphasized and explained in popular stories about the composition of the text. Some, says Rāma-kavi, the author of the *Ḍiṇḍima* commentary on *SL*, attribute the book to Śiva himself; others claim the author was Śaṅkara, an avatar of Śiva; still others assert that it emerged from the radiant teeth of the goddess Lalitā, the *Ādi-śakti* or primeval goddess.[35] But even those who think Śaṅkara was the author or direct recipient of the text describe a somewhat traumatic and truncated process of composition and transmission. Śaṅkara, dressed in his ascetic robe, was visiting Śiva's home on Kailāsa; there he noticed the book of the *mantra-śāstra*, which the goddess had left lying on Śiva's throne. All too

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[32] Sanderson 1990, 156.

[33] Almost certainly composed in south India.

[34] W. Norman Brown, who edited and translated the text, somewhat unconvincingly takes the final nine verses as a separate segment, the poet's prayer to the goddess: Śaṅkarācārya 1958, 1. These truly astonishing verses—filled with metapoetical statements—seem to me to emerge very naturally out of the preceding description.

[35] *Ḍiṇḍima-bhāṣya*, opening verses 3–4. All references to the *SL* and its commentaries refer to the edition by Kuppuswami 1991.

aware of the text's importance, Śaṅkara picked it up and hurried toward
the exit; but he was intercepted by Śiva's doorkeeper, Nandikeśvara. The
two fought over the secret treasure, and Śaṅkara managed to tear off
the pages containing verses 1–41, which he brought down to earth. He
added 59 stanzas of his own to complete the work.[36] Note that in this
account, the first (practical, theogonic) segment is unequivocally divine
in origin, a treasured possession of the goddess Pārvatī, and that it exists
as a *written* text. Writing plays an important role in other versions of
the story as well. Thus the somewhat mysterious "Tamil boy" (*draviḍa-
śiśu*) mentioned in verse 75—probably a reference to the *Tevāram* poet
Tiruñāṇacampantar—is said to have composed the entire poem and to
have inscribed it on Mount Kailāsa. Śaṅkara saw the verses there and
started to memorize them even as the goddess moved the author to
erase them. Fortunately, Śaṅkara's superb memory allowed him to retain
the first 41.[37] This somewhat poignant account of rapid memorization
against the clock insists on the notion of oral transmission—"oral" in
the sense that the transmitter inscribes the text verbatim on or in his
brain.[38] The *SL* is clearly important enough to merit such insistence.
Even so, this is a text that tends to disappear before our eyes; thus there
is the tragic loss of the other original 59 verses, initially graphically
recorded but then erased. So the written form of the text does have its
own necessity and integrity, in the eyes of the tradition, although it is the
oral, memorized version that endures. Writing is crucial, though not for
transmission. This conclusion recalls what we discovered in the domain
of *citra-kavya* and has somewhat similar implications, as we shall see.

By the time the Tamil poet Kavi-rāja Paṇṭitar produced a Tamil ver-
sion of the *SL*, in the sixteenth century, the written text was thought
to have gone through several permutations. Once Sarasvatī, the god-
dess of wisdom and arts, boasted to Śiva that she had composed the
SL, the book that offers a distilled version of all four Vedas by express-
ing the greatness of the goddess Yamalā (*yamaḷai*). Śiva laughed and
pointed at the slopes of the mountain, Kailāsa, where the whole text
was already inscribed. (Had Sarasvatī then re-composed or re-invented
verbatim an already existing work, like Pierre Menard?) Moreover, this
book imprinted on the mountain was copied and inscribed on another

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[36] Ibid., v; Subrahmanya Sastri and Srinivasa Ayyangar 1948, x.
[37] Kuppuswami, vi.
[38] I thank Jan Assmann for remarks in this vein.

mountain—Meru—by the "great ascetic" Puṣpadanta; and Gauḍa-pāda read it there, learned it by heart (*uḷam paṭittu*), and thus transmitted it to his pupil, Śaṅkarâcārya.[39] With some pathos the poet includes his own "mean composition" (*puṉ kavi*) in the line of further textual productions. But even here, where the *SL* exists in several written versions, there is still room for learning it by heart and passing it on in this fashion; and our text is not, apparently, a piece of pure artistry inspired by Sarasvatī but rather antedates this poetic stage. God himself created it and recorded it on stone.

We will be focusing on Lakṣmī-dhara's commentary on verse 32—in many ways the climax of the *Ānanda-laharī*, the first segment of *SL*. This stanza is universally recognized as articulating the secret sixteen-syllable *mantra* of Tripura-sundarī, thus as constituting the very heart of the esoteric system the book reveals. Before we attempt to understand it, we may benefit from a preview of the author's technique and the commentators' modes of applying or revising it.

Verse 19 of *SL* explicitly speaks of visualization:

> *mukhaṃ binduṃ kṛtvā kuca-yugam adhas tasya tad-adho*
> *harârdhaṃ dhyāyed yo hara-mahiṣi te manmatha-kalām/*
> *sa sadyaḥ saṅkṣobhaṃ nayati vanitā ity ati-laghu*
> *trilokīm apy āśu bhramayati ravîndu-stana-yugām//*

> A man who meditates on that part of you, Hara's[40] Queen,
> that rouses desire—making the dot into your face,
> with a pair of breasts below it and, below that,
> that half of Hara that is half of the sound-signs *ha-ra*—
> will agitate women with passion in a moment. What is more,
> he will drive all three worlds, that is, the Woman
> with sun and moon for her breasts,
> to distraction.

There are those who regard this verse as a statement of essence, the ultimate revelation of the *Śrī-vidyā* cult mentioned above. The goddess is to be visualized, and thus fully materialized and made present, in her form as Kāma-kalā, desire itself in all its generative and active potential. As such, she is not only infinitely desirable, a true subject for "erotic

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[39] *Ānanta-lahari*, *sauntarya-lahari* of Vīrai Kavi-rāja Paṇṭitar, verses 3–4. *yāmaḷai taṉ pĕrum pukaḻaiy āti maṟai nālin vaṭitt' ĕṭutta nūlai/ nāmakaḷ taṉ pāṭal it' ĕṉr' araṉarkku navila avar nakai cĕyt' aṉṟe/pāmakaḷaiy aruk' aḷaittup paruppatattiṟ pŏritt'irunta paricu kāṭṭuñ/cema-niti pāṭalaiy ĕṉ puṉ kaviyāṟ kŏḷvat' avaḷ tiṟamaiy aṉṟe//*

[40] Hara = Śiva.

magic," but she also embodies the *icchā-śakti* or "potential for wanting" inherent in the godhead. On the other hand, visualization of this sort can have very immediate uses (*prayoga*). As the verse literally states, a man who accomplishes the ritual meditation can make women fall in love with him without delay. He can even make the goddess herself, the object of his worship, who is none other than the total reality of the cosmos, dizzy with passion for him. Modern commentators find such promises embarrassing: A. Kuppaswamy, the learned and careful editor of *SL*, assures us that "this verse could at best be deemed as having reference to the taming of a shrewish wife."[41]

Very much in keeping with what we saw in the case of *citra-kāvya*, this verse expands the overt, explicit level of denotation in far-reaching ways. Its straightforward promise, while providing an essential foundation for what is being said, requires decoding from the opening phrases of the text. Words mean much more than they seem to say. The *bindu*-dot that becomes the face of a goddess is the central, focal point, a statement of infinity, of the *Śrī-cakra yantra*, the geometric model that serves the *Śrī-vidyā*. A series of nine triangles, four with apex pointing upward and five pointing downward, surround the *bindu* and are themselves encompassed by a series of lotus flowers, circles, and an outer square. Beneath the *bindu* we are meant to find a pair of breasts—apparently the two horizontal points of the first upward-pointing triangle; but we learn later in the verse that the breasts of the goddess are the sun and the moon, which inhabit the *Śrī-cakra*, as they inhabit the cosmos, the cosmicized body of the goddess, and the mantric sequence of sounds, in ways that can easily be specified (see below). Still further down, there is the "half of Hara/*ha-ra*": Lakṣmī-dhara, who will be our guide on this tour, tells us that this means *trikoṇa*, "triangle," and that this triangle is the triangular *yoni*, the genital organ of the goddess we are busy imagining and thus creating. One triangle subsumes the ramified series of triads and superimposed triangles so characteristic of the *Śrī-vidyā*. We are thus meant to visualize the goddess from face (or mouth, *mukham*) down to genitals. According to Lakṣmī-dhara, the exercise activates the *Māra-bīja* or "death-seed" (also "seed of desire," since Māra can refer to both these forces, which are anyway one), and the result is that the practitioner achieves a state of total identity with this beautiful goddess

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41 Kuppaswamy 1991, translation and notes, 41.

(*tayā kāntayâtmanas tādātmyaṃ sampādayet*). Not only is the goddess manifest before our eyes as a result of our meditation and proper use of the *mantra*; if we have done our work well, we are now entirely equated with her, and thus fully intact feminized cosmoi in our own right. We have to remember at this point that we are reading the verse through the eyes of Lakṣmī-dhara (1497–1539), who, we think, came from Orissa (he was a devotee of Ekâmra-Śiva) and thus may give voice to the rather unusual regional tradition of Tantric Yoga that crystallized there, and further south along the coast, in medieval times.[42]

   All of this is hardly more than the surface meaning of this one verse. There are, incidentally, two further readily available surface patterns to be noted. First, one could just as correctly translate the opening phrase (*mukhaṃ binduṃ kṛtvā*) in the reverse order from our attempt above: " [A man who meditates…] making your face into the dot." There is no particular reason to prefer the fully anthromorphized visual image to the geometric one of the *yantra* (or, for that matter, to the implicit one enacted by the phonemes). Secondly, in either reading, what the meditator does is, literally, to "make this goddess revolve" (*bhramayati*). We can take it as a general rule that such verses produce a goddess who is by no means fixed in place or static but who rather turns, twists, evolves, devolves, revolves. Mantras are highly dynamic devices (hence the danger connected to their use).

   What about the somewhat mysterious "half of Hara/*ha-ra*?" Again, the surface denotation is simple enough: Śiva or Hara is androgynous, and the worshiper of the goddess naturally visualizes the female half of him, as the commentators' gloss—the triangular *yoni* down below— confirms. But the two phonemes, *ha* and *ra*, or their graphic form as a ligature (*hra*), provide several further, rather startling possibilities. Another popular south Indian commentator on the *SL*, Kaivalyâśrama, spells them out in his *Saubhāgya-vardhanī*. First, if you do away with the upper half of the grapheme *ha* (ह), you get an image of the *yoni*. This, says Kaivalyâśrama, is the plain or obvious meaning (*prakaṭârtha*). Or take *ha*, which is half of *ha + ra*: this *ha* actually "means," if that is the right word, *ravi[ḥ]*, the sun. Of course, when we normally pronounce

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[42] Brown insists (Śaṅkarācārya 1958, 20–21) that the *SL* itself knows nothing of the identification of the subtle psycho-physiology of the goddess—the six *cakras*—with the practitioner's own body along the standard lines of macro-microcosmic analogy. In Lakṣmī-dhara, such correspondences are axiomatic. For Lakṣmī-dhara's dates see Goudriaan and Gupta 1981, 147–48.

the phoneme *ha*, we tend to forget that *ravi*—this one specific term for the sun among many—is its actual denotation. The adept, fortunately, is guided by the *SL* to the contextually appropriate meaning. But this is only the first step. *Ravi* has 4 elements—*r, a, v,* and *i*, two consonants and two vowels. But the verse wants us to use only half of them (the principle of "halving" is seen as generalized at this crucial point), so naturally we erase the consonants (consonants are anyway embedded pieces of death in this esoteric phono-metaphysics, as we see already in *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 2.22.3).[43] This leaves us with *a + i*. As Pāṇini tells us, these two simple vowels coalesce into the diphthong *e*—which happens to be identical in its graphic shape to what we got earlier when we shaved off the upper half of the grapheme *ha*, i.e., the *yoni*. Notice how operations on the aural level correspond precisely, in this world, with operations on the level of writing.

There is more. Kaivalyâśrama offers us yet another reading that, not surprisingly, leads to virtually the same result. *Ha* also "means" *haṃsaḥ*, "goose" (in the nominative singular). Removing half of *haṃsaḥ* by deleting the two death-dealing consonants, we are left with *aṃ + aḥ* [in Devanagari script: हं + सः]. I hope you have already noticed the three *bindu* dots (one nasalizing *a*[*ṃ*], the other providing *visarga* aspiration to *a*[*ḥ*]). Now the verse really makes sense. One dot becomes the goddess's face; two others, placed beneath it, are her breasts. Beneath these three we are instructed to find that half of *ha + ra* which makes *e*, i.e. the *yoni*—and we already know how to do this. There is no rule in this "grammar" that limits operations to a single application.

So, as the commentor remarks, the *ha* phoneme is thrice useful, each time through cutting it in half—first as Śivā, the goddess herself (that is, the phoneme *e*); then as *raviḥ*; finally as *haṃsaḥ*. You will be relieved to learn that none of these phonetic identifications is particularly mysterious; *all* of them, says Kaivalyâśrama, in conclusion, are *prakaṭa*, "obvious." The deeper meaning of the phoneme *ha* is, however, a secret that can only be learned from the mouth of one's teacher; it should definitely not be publicly unveiled, which is why he, Kaivalyâśrama, stops at this level of explication (*vastuto hakārârtho gupto guru-mukhād avagamyaḥ. tat-prakāśane mahad an-iṣṭam iti na prakāśitaḥ*). Still, there is one more way to unpack the verse: the first *bindu*-dot is the sun, *i.e.* the face of the goddess; moon and fire are the two lower dots, *i.e.* her breasts,

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[43] See Padoux 1990, 17.

beneath which we, once again, find the *yoni* in the form of the syllable *ha*.[44] In short, however we read this small piece of the verse, we end up with a lucid cosmogram in the visible image of the delectable goddess. Moreover, this visual image is what the various sounds actually mean, although they have to be decoded if one is to know this consciously. "Half of Hara/*ha-ra*" does mean "goddess." In fact, it expresses this meaning in a remarkably overdetermined way, since the goddess is iconographically half of Śiva, as we know, and since the phonemes pronounce her into existence through the automatic operation of their internal forces, combined according to the mechanical laws of this new science of astrophonetics. To understand the verse is thus *not* to piece together its overt semantics, although without their existence nothing may happen. Understanding is the actual materialization of this divine presence, its activation as a revolving or "dancing" being[45] and, as Lakṣmī-dhara has told us, the complete transformation of the mantra-chanter or practitioner into this goddess. That, we can conclude, is what language is for.

We have lingered over this single poem in order to attune our ears to its way of speaking, to encounter its peculiar lexicon in a relatively unambiguous context, and to observe inductively the primary principles of the grammar that serves its medieval commentators. Each verse like this one becomes, in fact, a grammatical essay in its own right. I want to stress again that such a grammar entails very powerful graphic and visual components; we cannot begin to describe morphology and syntax without addressing the projected images of the divinities who are brought into being by every sentence. As for poetic effect—and the *SL* is definitely experienced by connoisseurs as great poetry—think what it means for a poem to be able to turn its listener into a goddess and, at the same time, to put this newly emergent goddess-self into rapid movement.

Unwinding the Kuṇḍalinī

We can now turn to verse 32, where the principles outlined above come most fully into play. This verse, as explicated by Lakṣmī-dhara, assumes awareness of the subtle physiology outlined in *SL* 9: the body of the

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[44] *Saubhāgya-vardhanī*, 194.
[45] Cf. *SL* 41.

goddess, who is the universe, contains six *cakra* energy-sites, each linked to one of the elements.[46] Beginning at the bottom, at the base of the spine, we have the *mūlâdhāra*, connected to earth; above it is the water-bound *maṇi-pūra*; then the fiery *svâdiṣṭhāna*;[47] then the heart *cakra*, elsewhere referred to as *anāhata* (the "unstruck" sound at the edge of silence), where there is air or wind; then *viśuddhi*, in the area of the throat, the site of *ākāśa*, "space;" and finally, between the eyebrows, *ājñā*, where the mind, *manas*, dwells. Above this vertical column is a thousand-petalled lotus, *sahasrâra-padma*, the place of the goddess in her holistic, luminous form, united with her consort, Sadā-śiva; here she is the ultimate part (*kalā*) of herself, that complete part that is defined as awareness per se, *cit*, and that is reflected downward onto the lower *cakras* when the cosmos begins to evolve.[48] However, the very bottom of the column is no less her home (*bhūmi*): here she makes her own "self" into a serpent (*bhujaga-nibham adhyuṣṭa-valayaṃ svam ātmānaṃ kṛtvā*)—called the Kuṇḍalinī, "coiled"—and here she sleeps in a hollow cavity (*kula-kuṇḍe kuhariṇi,* 10). In a sense, the life of this goddess is lived between these two ends of the vertical pole that gives shape to her body—between the upper limit of playfulness and integral awareness and the lower end of sleep, unactivated potentiality, and dream. This picture of her ongoing inner life also inheres in the *Śrī-cakra* diagram and in the mantric sequence we are about to study, and it definitely allows, indeed demands, a highly active role for each person who comes to her via our text. Such a person is called upon to decide whether to wake the goddess or to let her sleep—or to put her back to sleep.

Verse 32 reads as follows:

> *śivaḥ śaktiḥ kāmaḥ kṣitir atha raviḥ śīta-kiraṇaḥ*
> *smaro haṃsaḥ śakras tadanu ca parā-māra-harayaḥ/*
> *amī hṛl-lekhābhis tisṛbhir avasāneṣu ghaṭitāḥ*
> *bhajante varṇās te tava janani nāmâvayavatām//*

We will need two translations to begin with:

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[46] Brown, Śaṅkarācārya 1958, 13–16, reads the *cakras* as successive stages in the cosmogonic process.
[47] The order of these last two is reversed in *SL* compared to "standard" Tantric Yoga physiology. See discussion by Brown, Śaṅkarācārya 1958, 14.
[48] For this reflection, *chāyā*, see Lakṣmī-dhara on *SL* 32, 277 (and see discussion below).

(A)
Śiva, Śakti, the Love-God, the earth,
then sun, moon, Memory,[49] goose, Indra
and then the Supreme Goddess, Death,[50] and Hari[51]—
these phonemes, combined with the three
heart-syllables at the ends[52] form the elements, Mother,
of your name.

(B)
[The words] *śiva, śakti, kāma, kṣiti*, then *ravi, śītakiraṇa,
smara, haṃsa, śakra*, followed by *parā, māra*, and *hari*—
these phonemes, combined with the three
heart-syllables at the ends form the elements, Mother,
of your name.

Version A gives us a strangely beautiful, somewhat surreal concatenation—
a universe, apparently linguistic in nature (since all its elements are
classed as phonemes), in which various deities, heavenly bodies, desire,
and one lonely goose seem scattered randomly in perceptual space. The
last two quarters of the verse explain that this set of elements actually
makes up the parts, *avayava*, of the goddess herself, or of her name
(*nāma*). By gathering them together, we must be gathering *her* together,
perhaps in the classical manner of Vedic ritual, whose major goal was
to reassemble the diffuse, disarticulated parts of the creator, Prajāpati.
Clearly, the name is critical to this enterprise. It is, however, also pos-
sible to read *nāma* as an independent exclamation or indeclinable,[53]
so that the final statement could mean simply, "these phonemes…
constitute [or, alternatively, *become*] your parts." In any case, on the level
of primary denotation, we have a statement about the phonematic for-
mation of the goddess as a recognizable, present entity. In short, a *mantra*
is being evoked, as is also suggested by the previous verse (31): Paśupati-
Śiva brought down the *tantra*-teaching of the goddess at her insistence
(*tvan-nirbandhād*). To know more about this teaching, encapsulated in
verse 32, or about the mantra that embodies it, we will need the help of
Lakṣmī-dhara.

In version B, the usual referents of the various lexical items listed—
śiva, śakti, and so on—are of little interest. These are to be replaced

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[49] Another name for Kāma, the god of love.
[50] Or, again, a name of Kāma.
[51] = Viṣṇu.
[52] Of each respective group.
[53] Thus Subrahmanya Sastri and Srinivasa Ayyangar 1948, 125.

with an encoded meaning, which in every case is a phoneme/syllable (a vowel or consonant + vowel) needed to build the mantra. Thus, following Lakṣmī-dhara, the word *siva*[54] actually indicates the syllable *ka*. *Śakti* means *e*, *kāma* = *i*, and *kṣiti* = *la*. (We could also say that each of these words "means" in a process that has two stages: the phonic sequence *kṣi-ti* means "earth," and "earth," in this system, means the syllable *la*.) The particle *atha* separates these first four items from the next set, and we learn from the second half of the verse that at the end of each such series we have to add the "heart-grapheme" (*hṛl-lekhā*) which, says Lakṣmī-dhara, is *hrīṃ* (note final nasal). Thus we have as the first segment of the mantra:

> *ka-e-i-la-hrīṃ*

Continuing the decoding:

> *ravi* (sun)= *ha* [as we learned above in v. 19]
> *śītakiraṇa* (moon) = *sa*
> *smara* = *ka*
> *haṃsa* = *ha* [as in 19]
> *śakra* = Indra = *la*

Another break, marked by the particle *tadanu*, allows us to conclude the second segment of the mantra:

> *ha-sa-ka-ha-la-hrīṃ*

And the final segment:

> *parā* = *sa*
> *māra* = *ka*
> *hari* = *la*

So the whole mantra, so far, reads:

> *ka-e-i-la-hrīṃ ha-sa-ka-ha-la hrīṃ sa-ka-la hrīṃ*

This arcane series of sounds, says Lakṣmī-dhara, presents us with a nearly complete image (*pratīkatva*) of the goddess or of her name. Yet there is still something missing—indeed the most important element of all. There are 15 syllables in the mantra we have "translated" from the verbal tokens in the verse, but the goddess Tripura-sundarī has

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[54] Or any of its synonyms—although this rule does not apply evenly throughout. Note *kāma* = *i* but *smara*, normally a synonym of *kāma* = *ka*.

a 16-syllable mantra (ṣoḍaśâksarī).[55] Only a *guru* is allowed to reveal the last, secret syllable. It must not be imparted to anyone who is not a student (*śiṣya*) of such a *guru*. Here Lakṣmī-dhara seems to be struggling with himself; he acknowledges that he should not disclose the syllable to those who have not gone through the ritual of accepting his authority as teacher, with their hands folded above their heads, after touching his feet. He finally opts for a lenient ruling: "Those who see my book and learn the final *kalā* (syllable or part) *are* my students." He sees this as an act of compassion on his part to those who are hungry for true knowledge (*jijñāsu*). Now he tells us (and I, with some trepidation, allow myself to repeat the information): the ultimate *kalā* is *ś + r + ī + bindu* (nasalization), or *śrīṃ*.

Say these syllables correctly and precisely in this order and something will happen. Lakṣmī-dhara explains it some detail, although it is left to us to try to piece together the underlying logic and mechanics. We will return to the more properly linguistic and poetic aspects of this process in the concluding section; for the moment let me try to summarize what happens on the astro-temporal plane, following the order of Lakṣmī-dhara's presentation. Now that we know what the name-tokens explicitly given in the verse actually "mean," we can proceed to put them together as building-blocks of the cosmos that is the goddess. Very much as in verse 19, with its pyro-solar-lunar constellation, the three main segments of the mantra, separated from each other by *hrīṃ*, fall into place as the domains of fire (*āgneya-khaṇḍa*), sun (*saura-khaṇḍa*), and Soma (*saumya-khaṇḍa*) [i.e. the nectar of immortality that is stored in the moon], respectively. Between each of the domains, where the syllable *hrīṃ* operates, we find one of the cosmic "knots" or "nodes" (*granthi*), at once connecting the otherwise disparate parts of the cosmos and blocking movement among them: the so-called Rudra-knot between segments 1 and 2, the Viṣṇu-knot between 2 and 3, and the final, ultimate block—the Brahma-knot adjacent to the *mūlâdhāra* at the base of the *cakra* column—between 3 and 4.[56] Where, you may ask, is segment 4? It is the almost inaudible, most secret, mono-syllabic sixteenth element of the mantra mentioned above, the one that turns the mantra into an effective theurgic instrument. This last segment is the

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[55] The 15-syllable mantra has its own uses, however. As *Śoḍaśâksarī* ("the 16-syllabled"), the goddess is also pictured as a perpetually 16-year-old girl.

[56] On the *granthis*, see Gupta, Hoens and Goudriaan 1979, 175.

moon-part domain (*candra-kalā-khaṇḍa*), that dimension of divine existence in which the part, *kalā*, is truly the whole and, as such, drenched in the lunar stuff of Soma or of complete awareness (*cit* or, more precisely, *parā kalā cid ekarasā*).

All this may seem rather a lot to load onto a short syllabic sequence, but in fact we have only begun the task of putting the mantric cosmos together. Each of the first three domains we have just defined has other specific aspects relating to states of consciousness (waking, dreaming, and deep sleep), to certain intra-divine potentialities (the goddess's ability, *śakti*, to know, to want, and to act), and to the various strands (*guṇa*) and modes (*vṛtti*) that together weave the universe into existence. In effect, as one recites the mantra, the goddess—who is literally emerging into being through this linguistic act—moves from wakefulness (in the domain of fire) to dreaming (in the solar domain) to dreamless sleep (in the Soma state). As we know from the Upaniṣads, there is also a fourth, still deeper state (*turīya*); and it is not hard to guess that this ultimate state, an awakening far beyond, indeed opposed to, our everyday waking, is triggered by the recitation of the final *kalā*-syllable. Working on the goddess in this manner, the practitioner also recapitulates each stage in the corresponding sphere of his own innerness. The climax, for him or Her, is reached when the slumbering Kuṇḍalinī begins to stir.

Even on the most direct, corporeal level, the goddess inhabits the sounds of the mantra. Her head is present in the first segment, her trunk (neck to waist) in the second, and the third segment manifests her lower parts (she is thus *mūla-kūṭa-traya-kalevarā*).[57] Notice the direction of movement, exactly corresponding to what we saw in verse 19.[58] The unfolding of the mantra actualizes Tripura-sundarī from the head down. This initial direction is reversed only when the final, sixteenth syllable is pronounced. We will return to this point.

But the above description, which is fairly standard and familiar to anyone interested in Tantra,[59] still fails to tell us *how* the system works—*why*, that is, the Kuṇḍalinī should stir. The true power of Lakṣmī-dhara's commentary is evident at this point. For what follows is an unusually detailed, lucid, indeed scientific statement of the actual mechanisms

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[57] See *Ānanda-laharī-ṭīkā*, 294; Kuppuswamy, 57.

[58] And note that this direction runs against Mallinātha's well-known prescription (ad *Kumāra-sambhava* 1.33)—that deities are to be described from the feet up.

[59] Or, for that matter, in terms of technique, to anyone who has studied the *bandhu*-correspondences in Vedic ritual, as in the *Chāndogya* passage cited earlier.

involved, one that goes far beyond mere statements of esoteric equations and correlates. The mantric unfolding of Tripura-sundarī requires a highly dynamic, systemic vision. The mantra works *not* through the intentionality of its reciter, *not* by "knowing thus," in the Upaniṣadic mode, and not by a principle of sympathetic (magical) analogy, as is often thought to be the case.[60] There is nothing symbolic about this process at any point. Similarity is not its organizing concept. Rather, in a world composed of language, in the deepest sense—a vibrating or humming arena of musical, rhythmic energies that can be seen no less than heard—the patterned repetition of carefully selected, scientifically compressed, modular sound-sequences activates powerfully transformative forces. These sound-sequences resonate with one another, augmenting, enhancing, catalyzing or contrasting with one another in regularly repeating ways, whether they are released in the mantra, by the interplay of celestial bodies or, if we could but hear them, by the subtle buzzing and throbbing of our own arteries and veins. Still, "resonance"[61] alone cannot explain the system.

Here is a much reduced restatement, after Lakṣmī-dhara, of the mechanisms involved. The moon waxes and wanes, either gaining or losing one digit (*kalā*) every day. More precisely, the first *kalā* emerges from the sun on the day after new-moon day (*śukla-pratipad*) and rejoins the sun on the first day of the dark half of the month (that is, the day following full moon). Similarly for each of the other *kalās*. There are 16 such *kalās* (15 lunar days, *tithis*, in each half-month, plus the 16th which remains always on Śiva's head[62] or which resides, as the *cit*-form of the goddess, on the thousand-petalled lotus at the top of her [and our] subtle body). Each *kalā* is also a goddess in her own right, one of a set of 16 *Nityā*s.[63] You will recall that our mantra has 16 syllables.

On full-moon day (*paurnamāsī*) the sun and the moon are most distant from one another (and the moon has absorbed the maximum of solar energy it can hold); on new-moon day (*amāvāsya*), the sun and moon are closest, actually conjoined (*atyanta-saṃyoga*). Exactly the same process is going on continuously in the subtle body: the moon

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[60] On the conceptual and logical structure of verbal magic, see the classic discussion by Tambiah 1968.

[61] *anuraṇana*, a term more at home in Abhinavagupta's poetics than in his Tantric metaphysics.

[62] My thanks to H.V. Nagaraja Rao.

[63] On the Nityā series, see Gupta 1:13.

and the sun are active in the invisible channels called Iḍā (on the left) and Piṅgalā (on the right), respectively.[64] The moon is constantly sprinkling the *amṛta*-elixir (liquified by the absorption of solar energy) into the 72,000 subtle channels (*nāḍī*) that course through this subtle physiology, and this soothing intravenous drip ultimately reaches the pit (*kuṇḍa*) in the *mūlâdhāra-cakra* at the base of the spine, where the Kuṇḍalinī is sleeping. The sun, on the other hand, soaks up and takes away the *amṛta*.[65] These processes, though unceasing, are asymmetrical and dynamic, as anyone can see by looking at the changing phases of the moon. Moreover, just as the sun and moon come into close conjunction in the heavens on new-moon day, so they are conjoined on this same day in their physiological trajectories. Thus, as Lakṣmī-dhara very eloquently states,

> When the moon and the sun come together (*samāveśa*) in the *mūlâdhāra*, the *amāvāsya* (new-moon) day is born. Similarly, the days of the dark half of the month are born.[66] At that point, through contact with the sun's rays,[67] the Kuṇḍalinī is sleeping in the pit of the *mūlâdhāra*, which is filled with elixir dripping from the waning moon. Her sleeping state is what is called "the dark half of the month." When the Yogi who has concentrated his awareness (*samāhita-citta*) is able to block up the moon in the moon channel (Iḍā) and the sun in the sun channel (Piṅgalā) by means of his breath (literally wind, *vāyu*), the moon and the sun, thus trapped, are unable to sprinkle the elixir or to suck it up, respectively. At that moment, when the inner wind fans the flames of fire burning in the *svâdhiṣṭhāna-cakra*, the pit of elixir dries up and the Kuṇḍalinī, starved (of elixir), wakes and, hissing like a serpent, breaks through the three knots and bites the orb of the moon moving in the middle of the thousand-petalled lotus (above the set of *cakras*). As a result, streams of elixir are set free and flood the moon-sphere above the *ājñā-cakra*—and then they flood the entire body."[68]

This exquisite experience, in the lunar mode, is one of full self-awareness (*tat-kalā cin-mayī ānanda-rūpā ātmeti gīyate*). Indeed, it defines the self, *ātman*, as such. It is also defined as the goddess, Tripura-sundarī (*saiva tripura-sundarī*), present, active, and now entirely awake.

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[64] These channels also divide up their activity between night and day and, on another level of the cycle, between the 6-month southern and northern courses of the sun (*pitṛ-yāna* and *deva-yāna*).

[65] The description fits a pervasive conceptual pattern built around *giving forth* and *taking away*: see Handelman and Shulman 2004, 216.

[66] On this puzzling statement, seemingly out of sequence, see below.

[67] Which, as mentioned above, apparently melt the cool or even frozen *amṛta*.

[68] Lakṣmī-dhara on *SL* 32, 278–79.

Lakṣmī-dhara's conclusion, which he classes as yet another profound secret (*rahasya*), is that Yogic masters can only wake the Kuṇḍalinī during the bright half of the month, as the moon is waxing. In fact, however, he has already informed us that the Kaulas can and do perform this exercise for Nityā, who subsumes all the other Nityās/*kalās, every day*.[69] Time collapses into embedded re-encapsulations of its natural rhythm, identical in terms of their internal composition with the larger, more extended temporal units. Thus all the days of the dark half of the month are contained (*antar-bhavanti*) within the new-moon day, as all the days of the light half can be called "full moon." By the same token, any single day, including the night, repeats the unrolling sequence of the year with its northern and southern solar paths. Such cycles within cycles consistently reproduce, on each level, the same brief window of opportunity when Amāvāsya—the "day" of the new moon—arrives or is generated by the Yogi's holding of his breath (*kumbhaka*), as described above. This is the moment when ongoing solar and lunar operations are held in suspension, when the pit empties out completely and the famished Kuṇḍalinī wakes and rises up through the entire organism of cosmos/goddess/adept, of *yantra* overlapping *mantra*. Only total metabolic failure—no more *amṛta*-drip and re-absorption—concomitant with the coincidence of sun and moon in the lowest *cakra*, as in the sky, can create this precious, fleeting space for potential change. Or, stated positively: time itself, in all its cycles, regularly conduces to that recurrent but evanescent point at which the goddess emerges, timeless (*nityā*), in her entirety, unwinding or unravelling herself from the coiled, soporific state that has kept her hidden deep within us—or within the depths of her own being. Incidentally, although Lakṣmī-dhara does not say so in this context, this same recurrent moment is that split second when, for every one of us, a latent, largely unconscious urge to speak (*vivakṣā*) is fanned into flame and, rising from within us, bursts forth as audible speech.[70] The miracle of language, which we take for granted, is this repeated, always unexpected, literally breath-taking, unwinding ascent of an emergent goddess.

But a critical distinction has to be made here. Time has the dynamic structure just described built into its flow, even if we generally fail to

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[69] See also ibid., 282.

[70] See Padoux 1990, 126. For the process of articulation as *vivakṣā* fanned into flame by the internal breath or wind, see *Pāṇinīya-śikṣā* 4–7; also *Saṅgīta-ratnâkara* of Śārṅgadeva, 3.4.

give it our attention (and thus waste the moment). Language, in normal use, does not. Everyday speech (*vaikharī*, as Bhartṛhari, and following him the Śākta Tantrikas, call it) is diffuse and dispersed. It also tends to be overburdened with those distracting residues of reality that we call "meaning," in the more trivial sense of the word (as in our translation A of *SL* 32). To stick with this level of language is to condemn ourselves, and the Kuṇḍalinī, to continuous coma. For this very reason we need the mantra, which translates a low-level semantics into the rhythms and cadences of the cosmos. Thus the 15 + 1 lunar days (*tithi*), which embody the 15 + 1 parts (*kalā*) of the goddess (as 15 + 1 Nityās),[71] thereby unrolling her before our eyes, unroll on our tongues as 15 syllables moving precisely toward the Amāvāsya moment of awakening (syllable 16). This temporal rhythm is built into the mantra and enables its efficacy. The primary logic is one of systemic compression and expansion, or of miniaturization and inflation, an accordian effect that preserves the vital configuration of active forces at every level of expansion, from the most condensed to the most extended.

It is of some interest that this sequence runs its course, if read forward in its own terms, during the dark half of the month, as the moon wanes while *amṛta*-elixir is still dripping into the pit at the base of the spine. One strives toward Amāvāsya, from which point on—and only from that dark point—can the Kuṇḍalinī be awakened. The mantra itself takes us in this direction, syllable by syllable, *tithi* by *tithi*. This means that, recited backwards, as time moves toward the full moon, the same mantra will put the goddess back to sleep. You have your choice. The forward recitation must thus run contrary to the actual flow of time during the preferred period of recitation (as the moon waxes). Indeed, as we know, Tantric praxis is classically meant to reverse the course of time. Perhaps this explains the otherwise somewhat out-of-place statement by Lakṣmī-dhara that "the days of the dark half of the month are born" after the new moon. They are indeed born—through the Yogi's reversed recitation which brings the goddess (or the cosmos) into visible being as a sequential descent through the *cakras*, from her head to the base of her spine, from full moon to new moon, this being the necessary prelude to waking her.

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[71] Also, elsewhere, as 16 *tuṭis*, "breath-moments": *Tantrâloka* of Abhinavagaupta 6.63; Padoux 1990, 234.

Either way, the mantra works not merely as a cosmogram—an aural map of an unfolding cosmos, in every way identical with the *Śrī-cakra yantra*, each phoneme materializing another visible, defined part of the goddess—but also, and especially, as a chronophone, an audible repetition or reenactment of temporal process. In this sense, a work like the *SL*, at least in its early, practical segment, and in contrast to the *citra* poems we studied earlier, is fully four-dimensional. It has, that is, restored the dimension of linear temporal sequence to the poem, though only after first shattering any superficial linearity or natural semanticity, just as the *citra* poets seek to do.

Conclusion: Trans-semantic Poetics

I have drawn a line from a very ancient passage (*Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 1.13) through mature *kāvya* praxis in Sanskrit and other languages, to the *stotra-* or *mantra*-oriented poetry of medieval Tantra.[72] Certain features are common to all three instances. Phonemes and syllables have a life of their own and, often, automatic effects. Poets harness these properties to their own purposes. In the cases mentioned, these vary—the pure musicality of the Tamil *citra* poem is not, after all, as heavily pragmatic as *SL* 33—but "natural" sequence precludes any of them. The poem's normal progression from beginning to end is deliberately undermined from within—and with the disruption of this progression, the semantics of the surface are also profoundly disrupted. A new complex of relatively autonomous sonar elements, strongly resonant with one another, is produced. These elements invariably turn out to have graphic expressions, so that one can actually see the sounds (or hear the forms). Such combined phonic graphemes never represent or symbolize spatially real objects. They generate them. This process is at its most dramatically explicit in the verses we examined from the *SL*, which could be said to take the methodology of *citra* composition to a new limit.

   To understand the innovation, we need to take one more look at the text of *SL* 32, now that we have decoded it with Lakṣmī-dhara's help. The linguistic procedures at work in this one verse require further analytic restatement. First, it is worth asking ourselves if the mantra, before *or* after decoding, might not actually mean something apart from

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[72] There is, however, no implication that *SL* is in any way paradigmatic for *stotra* literature, which clearly ramifies into many distinct types.

"goddess" or "unfolding cosmos" or the upward zoom of the Kuṇḍalinī—something more akin to everyday semantic operations. Look back at segments 2 and 3 of the mantra in their primary, *i.e.* straight or phonic translation: *ha-sa-ka-ha-la hrīṃ sa-ka-la hrīṃ*. Remember, too, that these syllables are capable of metrical arrangements and that, in their quadrapartite arrangement, they could be recited and heard as a verse with four quarters (including, of course, the hidden, near-silent final segment). If we align the two segments vertically, like in a verse, we get:

> *ha-sa-ka-ha-la hrīṃ*
> *sa-ka-la hrīṃ*

Even if one ignores the end-rhyme, it is hard to miss the *yamaka* effect. Specifically, *sa*, *ka*, and *la* repeat. As it happens, *sakala* means something or, rather, "everything." It is that entity that is "with all its parts" and thus "complete" or "whole." So our mantra can, in fact, revert to a semantic level where the word *sakala*, at least, means what it usually means, although no sooner does this word stand out than it is also dissected, stretched or expanded to include two other (*ha*) syllables in segment 2. In any case, a new relationship can be detected between the two segments, with both semantic and phonic facets combining somewhat unexpectedly. One could say that, as in many *citra* verses, the horizontal (semantic) and vertical (acoustic) tracks suddenly converge. I suppose this is the moment to mention that an alternative decoding of the mantra exists—we find it in Kaivalyâśrama's commentary, the *Saubhāgya-vardhanī*, which we cited earlier on verse 19—in which the entire first segment (which Lakṣmī-dhara reads as *ka-e-i-la*) translates as *ha-sa-ka-la*.[73] Were we to prefer this way of reading, the *yamaka* repetition of *sakala* would be overwhelming, to the point of constituting or reconstituting both the mantra as a whole and the esoteric meaning of the verse.

Even if we stick with Lakṣmī-dhara, *sakala* is hardly an innocent term. The "parts" referred to are surely the *kalās* of the goddess Tripura-sundarī herself—she who is, as you may recall, the ultimate, all-containing *kalā* situated at the top of the Tantric psycho-cosmos. Now look at the mantra again:

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[73] This reading of verse 32, beginning with the syllable with *ha*, is seen as embodying the *hâdi-vidyā* and contrasting with the *kâdi-vidyā*, which is then produced by one decoding of verse 33. This is not the place to go into this distinction in detail, but Kaivalyâśrama relates the *kâdi-vidyā* to pleasure- or power-oriented effects in the cosmos ruled by *saṃsāra*. The *hâdi-vidyā*, by implication, leads to release.

ka-e-i-la-hrīṃ ha-sa-ka-ha-la hrīṃ sa-ka-la hrīṃ

Take the first syllable, *ka*, and combine it with the final syllable of seg-
ment 3, *la*—*i.e.* the entire overt mantric sequence—and you get a Pāṇini-
style abbreviation (*pratyāhāra*), which is none other than this same *kalâ*.
In Pāṇinian grammar, such an abbreviation includes within it, indeed
properly denotes, all the phonemes in the middle (starting with the first);
and here, too, as Lakṣmī-dhara tells us, the entire unwinding of the god-
dess as cosmos is compressed into this sequence.[74] Just as the temporal
rhythms of the cosmos can be miniaturized and precisely reproduced
at any level—year, month, day, or a single second—so language can be
made to condense into its smallest units the structural processes work-
ing in larger ones, even subsuming in this manner the most exoteric
and devolved level of all, that of referential meaning. And if this is still
not enough, Lakṣmī-dhara goes on to explain how the four nasals in
the complete mantra quiver and hum as the faint, nearly inaudible *nāda*
that generates all perceptible sounds;[75] and how the three stages of *nāda,
bindu*, and *kalā* move through the mantra in its three parts, which are
also the three cosmic levels (fire, sun, Soma + moon) present in the *Śrī-
cakra*; and how eventually all the fifty phonemes of the Sanskrit lan-
guage, from *a* to *kṣ*, are manifest in their creative or potential forms (as
mātṛkas) in these three cosmogonic segments, in exact mathematical
distribution. Moreover, moving downward, the 16 Nityā goddesses are
compressed into the 16 phonemes, and these 16 phonemes are rolled
into the audible and visible 15, and these 15 are the stuff of sun, moon,
and fire, as we know. All such series can be either expanded or collapsed,
like the goddess herself, into thinner or more condensed—but always
structurally and dynamically equivalent—forms. Within this range of
existential, utterly non-symbolic processes, every syllable that breaks
through to audible surface is truly aflame. But perhaps it is time for us,
at any rate, to stop this endless proliferation and to ask ourselves, one
last time, what it all means.

   Let me say again that packing the syllables with ever more dense and
ramified correlations or identifications is not the point. What matters is
the tremendous internal movement that is felt to inhere in the sounds in
their specified vectors, movement triggered by aural experience and its
visual equivalent. All this is possible only because language *does* move

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[74] See Lakṣmī-dhara's rich discussion at the bottom of p. 279.
[75] See Padoux 1990, 96–105.

in such patterned and repetitive ways. Precise phonic sequence, scientifically arranged, acts systemically on all levels. Such repetition inevitably sets up resonances, or sets of musical relations, that cut across the linear progression of normally semanticized speech. A poem like the *SL* is conceived, among other things, to reveal and highlight such relations, very much in the manner of *citra-kāvya*. *Sa-ka-la* thus reverberates both horizontally and vertically in the mantra. But much more than in *citra* poetry, such reverberations in mantric poetry are felt to produce immediate and far-reaching effects.

In doing so, this four-dimensional poetry goes through two strikingly complementary processes. First, there is a complex series of translations. One has to translate the overt meaning of words like *śiva, śakti, earth, sun, desire, memory*, and so on, into the *sounds* that they point to or indicate. The terminology has its own importance. Lakṣmī-dhara rightly says that his entire decoding of the verse rests on the technique of transferred meaning, *lakṣaṇā*, or, more precisely (in some cases), that variety of the latter that is called *lakṣita-lakṣaṇā*—that is, an indirect transfer or secondary extension of meaning, as when the word *dvi-repha* ("having two *r*-sounds") is used instead of the common word *bhramara*, "bee."[76] In other words, one verbal token denotes or points to another. But behind the second such meaning in several of our mantric units lies not a conventional object but a pure sound. This sound, in turn, means something more, indeed a great deal more, as we have seen. More to the point, each such sound also *does* something. This action or movement is its meaning (although the first, overt semantic level is never wholly lost and may, as we have seen, reappear at another stage). In effect, the mantra, after completely denaturalizing any superficial semantics, *re-semanticizes* the verse as a series of events triggered by phonic or musical means.

That an action is the primary meaning of an utterance is nothing new for the Pāṇinians.[77] Nonetheless, the implicit analysis of meaningfulness in this Tantric linguistics takes matters in a startling direction. Generally, for the grammarians, the phonic sign (*vācaka*) precedes its object or meaning (*vācya*)—indeed, for Bhartṛhari, the latter derives directly from the former. Here, however, the *vācya* produced from the conventional

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[76] See discussion in Kunjunni Raja 1977, 254; Lakṣmī-dhara, 277.
[77] As the grammarians say, *bhāva-pradhānaṃ ākhyātam*: see *Kāśikā* ad Pāṇini 1.3.1, following Patañjali's discussion in *Mahābhāṣya* on this *sūtra*.

vācaka ("*śiva*," "*kṣiti*") is used to generate a further *vācaka*-phoneme that both triggers effects in the cosmos and thereby reconstitutes or reembodies the ultimate "object," that *vācya* that is the goddess who is also the speaker's true self. Such a semantics gives new meaning to the otherwise exotic notion of self-expression[78]—for the result is no less a matter of meta-psychology than of ontology. Better still, we might call it an existential phonology. Here meaning is not something described or reported—not a referent—but something immediately and literally effected, in the somewhat indirect procedure just described, by articulate speech.

Secondly, as stated earlier, and again in the wake of the initial disruption in linear progression, the mantra, once decoded, surprisingly restores sequence as intrinsic to its action. In stark contrast to a Bhartṛharian metaphysic, the *SL* insists on the sequentiality built into language at its most real. Without it, nothing will happen. The four-dimensionality of such poetry depends on it entirely. Nonetheless, we have to remember that the mantra may well work in several possible directions (forward, backward, criss-crossing, zig-zagging) and that, for all its explosive potential, there are strong elements holding it together (for example, the *pratyāhāra* "*kalā*" that holds its two ends in suspension).

A verse like *SL* 32 is its own grammar, working through a set of implicit meta-rules. One of these might be: "A word indicates not itself, not its audible sound-sequence, not its usual meaning, not any of its synonyms, but a certain phonic pattern."[79] "Any effective phonic pattern can be visually mapped and quantified" might be another. More abstractly, we could say that in such poems a musical semantics runs through, or beyond, most forms of verbal denotation. Quite often, though by no means always, these two currents turn out to be at odds. In such cases, the musical vector has a tendency to overpower the other. There is a historical dimension to this claim. I would argue that this problem, if it is a problem, lies at the very heart of Sanskrit poetry, from its beginning right through to the present day.[80] Hence the practical and effectual aspect of the Sanskrit poet, which keeps breaking through the high courtly image of the poet as professional artist.[81] As I remarked at

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[78] See Malamoud 2002.
[79] After the model of Pāṇini 1.1.68: *svaṃ rūpaṃ śabdasyâśabda-saṃjñā*.
[80] For a modern expansion of *citra*-style poetry, see the remarkable work by the nineteenth-century Sanskrit poet, U. Ve. Sundapalayam Tirumalai Rāmabhadrâcāri 2000.
[81] See Granoff.

the outset, there is a point where the Vedic *ṛṣi*, hearing and recording mantras, and the classical *kavi*, producing *kāvyas* or *stotras*, may meet. There is also, I think, a movement through the centuries toward ever greater or deeper musicality, in the practical sense just implied. Were we to extend the continuum as far as the complex Sanskrit songs (*kṛti* or *kīrtana*), many of them Tantric in import and method, by Muttusvāmi Dīkṣitar (from late 18th-century and early 19th-century Tiruvārūr in the Tamil country), we would see, as Harold Powers cogently says, that "grammatical and syntactic continuity, semantic content, and melodic-rhythmic continuity are carefully coordinated."[82] On the other hand, we would also certainly notice that

> however much one's attention may focus on the outward meaning of the songs, thence on to their esoteric allusions, soon enough the semantics begins to be overshadowed by the pure sound of the words, which take on independent life as carriers of musical rhythms and shapes. Then one's concrete perceptions of the specific rhythms of a particular song begin to fade too, to merge into an abstracted awareness of the general melodic shapes that those rhythms enliven, until finally one is absorbed in contemplation of the ideal and unmanifested configuration, the soundless sound....[83]

Strangely, in the case of the *SL*, such soundless sounds have a clearly visible, even tangible (mostly triangular) shape. Moreover, this soundlessness turns out to be rather noisy. In any case, for texts such as those we have been studying, we might want to posit a pragmatic poetics in which to wake the Kuṇḍalinī requires a semantics of an altogether different order—mathematical, geometric, musical, and at the same time wholly and necessarily concrete.

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[82] Powers 322.
[83] Ibid., 336.

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